1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

their rigorously maintained purity of blood; it is manifested in their commonplace conduct by a singular combination of hauteur and servility, forbidding association with aliens on terms of equality. The entire group at Costa Rica in 1894 were on good behavior, partly, no doubt, for profit, partly because they were at peace bought by bloodshed; yet they kept an impassable gulf between themselves and the Caucasians, and a still wider chasm against the Papago and Yaqui. They came to the tanque, usually in groups, rarely alone, always alert; especially when alone or in twos or threes, they moved slowly and stealthily in their peculiar collected and up-stepping gait, often stopping, always glancing furtively with roving eyes, and bearing a curious air of self-repression—as of the camp-prowling coyote who seems to hold down his instinctively bristling mane by voluntary effort. And the visitor to their ranchería sent a wave of influence before as his approach was noted; laughter ceased, languor disappeared, and a forced, yet sullen, amiability took their place, though the children and females edged away; if he appeared unexpectedly or came too close, the children and younger adults simply flitted like young partridges, while the elders stiffened rigidly, with bristling brows and everting lips and purpling eyes, perhaps accompanied by harsh gutturization—indeed the curiously canine snarl and growl, often evoked by the stranger unintentionally, betrayed the bitterness of Seri antipathy toward even the most tolerable aliens. Every human is panoplied in a personality, perhaps intangible but none the less real, which repels undue approach and fixes limits to familiarity on the part of strangers, friends, kinsmen, and mates, according to their respective degrees of mutually elective affinity; but the Seri are so close to each other and so far from all others that they are collectively panoplied against extra-tribal personalities even as are antipathetic animals against each other—and the Seri can no more control the involuntary snarl and growl at the approach of the alien than can the hunting-dog at sight or smell of the timber-wolf.

While the highly developed traits represented by pedestrian habit and hand-and-tooth habit and segregative habit expressing race-sense are conspicuous during exercise, each carries an equally well-marked obverse. Thus, while the Seri are known as runners par excellence in a region of runners, and were named by aboriginal neighbors from their spryness of movement, they have been no less notorious among the Caucasian settlers of two generations for unparalleled laziness—for a lethargic sloth beyond that of sluggish ox and somnolent swine, which was an irritating marvel to the patient padres of the eighteenth century, and is today a byword in the even-tempered Land of Mañana; concordantly the sinewy hands and muscular jaws are noticeably inert during the intervals between intense functionings, are practically free from the spontaneous or nervous movements of habitually busy persons, and contribute by their immobility to the air of indolence or languor which

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

461 so impressed padres and rancheros; concordantly also, the manifestations of race hate, doubtless culminating among warriors on the warpath, are strongly contrasted with the abject docility of the Seri groups when at peace and in camp near Costa Rica and other ranchos—a docility far exceeding that of the Papago, whose personal dignity is an ever-present possession, or that of Yaqui, whose strong spirit so often breaks the curb of Caucasian control. So the observer of the Seri is impressed by the intensity of functioning along lines defined by their characteristic traits, and equally by the capriciousness of the functioning and the remarkably wide range between activity and inactivity which render them aggregations of extremes—the Seri are at once the swiftest and the laziest, the strongest and the most inert, the most warlike and the most docile of tribesmen; and their transitions from rôle to rôle are singularly capricious and sudden. At the same time the observer is impressed by the relatively long intervals between the periods of activity; true, the intense activity may cover hours, as in the chase of a deer, or days, as in a distant predatory raid, or perhaps even weeks, when the tribe is on the warpath; yet all the known facts indicate that far the greater portion of the time of warriors, women, and children is spent in idle lounging about rancherias and camps, in lolling and slumbering in the sun by day and in huddling under the scanty shelter of jacales or shrubbery by night—i. e., when their activity is measured by hours, their intervals of repose must be measured by days.

000 Summarizing those somatic traits connected with habitual functioning, the Seri may be considered as characterized by (1) distinctive pedestrian habit, (2) conspicuous hand-and-tooth habit correlated with defective tool-sense, and (3) pronounced segregative habit correlated with a highly specialized race-sense; yet they are characterized no less by extreme alternations from the most intense functioning to complete quiescence—the periods of intensity being relatively short, and the intervals of quiescence notably long.

14 On reviewing the more conspicuous somatic structures and functions jointly, they are found to throw some light on their own development, and hence on the natural history of the Seri tribe.

Certain characteristics of the tribe strongly suggest lowly condition, i. e., a condition approaching that of lower animals, especially of carnivorous type; among these are the specific color, the centripetally developed body, the tardy adolescence, the defective tool-sense, the distinctive food habits (especially the consumption of raw offal and carrion), the independence of fixed habitations, and the extreme alternations between the rage of chase and war and the quiescence of sluggish repose. But these primitive characteristics are opposed or qualified by such features as the noble stature, the capacious and shapely brain-case, the well-developed hands, and the considerable intelligence revealed in native shrewdness as well as in organization and belief. Collectively the characteristics are in some measure incongruous; yet

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895) 1898 NU31 Sert NU31

miles in search of it, and acute enough to follow trails and indications. Naturally the meager water-supply serves as a mechanism for sorting out and preserving the strong and the acute, and for eliminating the weakly and the dull; and hence the tribe have developed a faculty, or perhaps a potentiality, of distinctive sort—the potentiality of providing against thirst-death by a reserve power in the organism itself rather than in the form of mechanical devices such as characterize higher culture. Quite similar are the relations to the resource of second importance, i. e., ordinary food. Habituated to dispensing with storage and transportation of their primary resource, and accustomed to finding food whenever forced to sufficiently active effort to obtain it, the Seri have never grasped that first principle of thrift expressed in the accumulation of food supplies; and accordingly they intuitively rely on successful fishing or chase or search of vegetal edibles for sustenance, and habitually delay effort until they are stirred into activity by the pangs of hunger. Naturally this improvidence serves as another mechanism for perpetuating families of stored vitality, and especially those able to prevail over swift or strong or cunning quarry by sustained vigor and alertness after prolonged deprivation; and the effect of this mechanism, too, is to develop a reserve power in the organism itself, in lieu of the material reserve made through thrift in higher culture. Similar in their consequences are the relations of the individual organisms to the third industry of Seriland, i. e., navigation of the gale-swept and tide-troubled waters. Even the buoyant balsa can not weather the williwaws or ride the tiderips of El Infiernillo without exercise of the utmost strength and skill on the part of the navigators; while the often persistent storms may delay for days embarkation on voyages in quest of fresh water or food. Naturally, the frequent delays and not infrequent perils of such navigation constitute a mechanism for selecting navigators possessed of reserve powers adequate to meet desperate emergencies with vigor and judgment even after enervating waits for wind and tide, while those not so well endowed are either brought up to standard in their hard training school or expelled from their class by drowning or dashing on the rocks, as may happen; so that the effect of this mechanism also is to preserve individuals and perpetuate generations characterized by reserve power, and hence to develop latent potentiality in the tribe. Now, the normal product of these and other natural mechanisms immediately reflecting environmental conditions is capacity for sparta, or for intense functioning under severe stress, despite accentuation of the stress by thirst or hunger or exhaustion, or by all combined—i. e., the effect of habitat and habit is to produce precisely such a somatic regimen as that so conspicuously displayed by the Seri folk. So the intensified activity with long intervals of inertness, simulating the habits of carnivorous and some other lower animals, and hence suggesting primitive condition, would appear to be largely a phylogenetically acquired character expressing specific adjustment to environment.

8: Ascher E-5 (1960) 1962 NU31 Seri NU31

for the point may come from the transmission of an abandoned car or from flotsam. The wood for the hafting can be mesquite or ironwood, both indigenous in the area; waste from boat construction or other scraps of wood may also be used. Rubber for the gasket may be obtained from a worn automobile tire. The wrapping cord and lead cord are store bought, and mesquite gum is used to seal the hafting.

In manufacturing foreshafts Seri fishermen use three tools: a knife, a hacksaw blade, and a triangular file. The hacksaw blade is used to cut an appropriate length of metal for the point and to rough out the barb; the triangular file is employed to finish the point barb and stem; the tang of the file is used to puncture the hole in the gasket which is to receive the point. The shaping of the hafting and gasket, and the cutting and wrapping of the lead cords, are accomplished with a knife.

With regard to the method of manufacture, all fishermen report essentially the same procedure. They describe the pattern as a series of steps under two headings: (1) shaping and (2) assembling. Two individuals did not mention steps 1c and 2b, and the others considered these two steps to be optional.

1) Shaping
   a) Shaping the metal into a point
   b) Shaping the wood for hafting the point
      α) Shaping the general form
      β) Splitting the form lengthwise and grooving each half to receive the point (see section in Figure 1)
   c) Shaping the rubber for the gasket

2) Assembling
   a) Placing the mesquite gum in the grooved portions of each half of the hafting (see section in Figure 1)
   b) Placing the gasket on the point
   c) Inserting the point base into the hafting and reuniting the split hafting form
   d) Wrapping with the wrapping cord and with it interweaving the lead cord
   e) Refinishing the hafting base to fit the mainshaft socket

Four men were able to explain the foregoing procedure in detail and were in agreement in the following matters. The point is shaped before the hafting because its length determines the length of the latter, and because the diameter of the point base dictates the grooving of the haft. The gasket is shaped after the point and the hafting because the diameter of its hole is determined by that of the point base and its total diameter by that of the hafting. The mesquite gum then secures the point and seals the hafting. Interweaving the lead cord with the wrapping cord secures the former to the hafting.

The amount of time required to complete a foreshaft shows marked variation. This is not primarily a function of the working habits of the artisan. If all the materials are present, the time it takes to make a foreshaft ranges from four to eight hours, but if all the materials are not available, as much as a year may be required. There may, for example, be a considerable lapse of time between the shaping of a point and the shaping of a gasket when material for the

411 gasket is not available. If a Seri needs a foreshaft for immediate
H61 use he can dispense with the gasket, but all the other materials are necessary to make the tool functional. As a result, a Seri may have one or several foreshafts in the same or in different stages of manufacture (see Plate II)[2], and he may also have a number of shaped or unshaped points or pieces of metal but few finished foreshafts.

411 If an archeologist were to excavate the remains of contemporary Seri culture at some time in the future his observational field would be limited to the results of behavior. Under ideal conditions, the data available to him for reconstructing the turtle fishing complex might include foreshafts, the materials from which and implements with which they were manufactured, and turtle carapaces.

411 All 21 finished foreshafts (Plate I)[1] exhibit an obvious general
184 similarity despite the fact that they range in age from one to eight years. Twenty of them have a single barbed point. Plate II[2] illustrates the general shape of the hafting, the place where the hafting has been split, a mesquite gum sealing, and a refinished hafting base—a combination of features that is exhibited in all 21 foreshafts. The manner in which the lead cord is interwoven with the extension cord is similar in all foreshafts except those in which either cord has been repaired. In nineteen cases (excluding one very long and one very short point), the length of the point beyond the hafting ranges from 4.4 to 6.1 cm. With three exceptions (one long and two short) the length of the hafting ranges from 5.8 to 7.8 cm. In all but two examples the hafting is longer than the point. The difference in length between the hafting and the point above the hafting varies within a range of 0.1 to 3 cm. Thus, with the exceptions noted, the maximal variation with respect to these measurements is small—1.7 cm. for the length of the point above the hafting, 2 cm. for the length of the hafting, and 3 cm. for the difference in length between the hafting and the point above the hafting (see Table 1).[3]

Examination of the three available sets of foreshafts produced by single individuals reveals a smaller range of variation within each set than within the entire collection. In four foreshafts of Juan Moreno the length of the point above the hafting ranges from 4.9 to 5.2 cm., and the length of the hafting from 6.1 to 6.7 cm. The sets produced by Francisco Barnett (see Plate II)[2] and by Miguel Barnett show a comparable restriction in the range of variation. A comparison of the three sets, however, shows that their measurements are similar enough to each other to provide little basis for distinction. The range in length of the haftings of Juan Moreno (6.1 to 6.7 cm.), for example, overlaps that of the haftings made by Francisco Barnett (6.4 to 7.7 cm.).

Variety in the 21 finished products taken as a group, other than that due to differential age and use, is most evident in one particular respect: eight of them lack a gasket. Each owner of foreshafts without gaskets was asked to explain this absence. Two could not or would not give an explanation; five replied that rubber was not available; and one man, Ignacio Molina, stated that he omitted a gasket be-

[1] [Facing p. 364] [2] [Facing p. 365] [3] [page 367]